



## Conservative Women's Activist Wants Policy Wins After 'Saying "No" For A Long Time'

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Like many Americans, [Carrie Lukas](#) wasn't thrilled about the fractious political climate of the 2016 presidential election.

"There were a lot of awkward questions, but I actually thought that at the end, a lot of it was pretty simple," Lukas, the newly-named president of the conservative grassroots group [Independent Women's Forum \(IWF\)](#), said in an interview with Bold.

Lukas said she was unable to support candidate Hillary Clinton because she thought Clinton would have expanded government's reach, raised taxes and generally advanced the agenda of Barack Obama, a president who Lukas often disagreed with. And so Lukas voted for then-candidate Donald Trump.

"I called the balls and strike like I see them," Lukas said. "There's a lot about Trump that I don't like and disagree with. For example, the Billy Bush tape—I don't think it's appropriate. It's particularly not appropriate for our public leaders. That said, when it comes down to assessing two candidates on their broad vision for healthcare, the Supreme Court, tax policy, I thought that what he was proposing was better than what Mrs. Clinton proposing. You don't have to love everything about a candidate."

Lukas is the co-author of the book [Liberty Is No War on Women](#), and the author of [The Politically Incorrect Guide to Women, Sex, and Feminism](#). Before joining IWF in 2003, Lukas worked on Capitol Hill as senior domestic policy analyst with former Rep. Chris Cox (R-Calif.) at the House Republican Policy Committee. She also worked at the [Cato Institute](#), a libertarian think tank and has testified before the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Social Security.

"I love to talk to Democrats," Lukas said. "I understand and I sympathize with them. I understand it's hard when your team loses and you're concerned about the direction of the country. One of the good things is that we have tremendous checks on power."

Lukas said she has been pleased with Trump rolling back some Obama-era executive orders and generally scaling back the administrative state. However, she isn't in lockstep agreement with the White House on everything and isn't afraid to say so.

"When I hear from the Trump team, from some folks in the White House about what they're looking at, we provide as much information as we can," Lukas said. "Tax relief for parents we say 'That's great.' Childcare proposals required facilities on their premises. I thought 'That's a terrible idea,' and was very clear to say that. We try to focus on the policies rather than the politics or personalities."

When Lukas talks about childcare policy, it's not just an abstraction for her. A mother of five, Lukas juggles her parenting duties while also serving as a contributor to [National Review](#), [Forbes.com](#) and [Acculturated](#). And if that wasn't enough, Lukas is also vice president for policy and economics at the Independent Women's Voice, an IWF-affiliated 501c4 that can be more openly engaged in direct advocacy than IWF, a 501c3.

“On issues of paid leave, trying to require states to expand unemployment insurance to include protections for paid leave, I sympathize with what they're trying to do,” Lukas said. “I understand there's a push from the Left for a new entitlement. I know there's a desire to do something. People need to be very aware there's no such thing as a free lunch. There's tremendous cost and consequences for women's opportunities. The downsides are evident in European experience. I think the devil's really going to be in the details...I'm totally sympathetic the idea of trying to help people who lack paid leave, but I'm worried about what it would do in a one-size-fits all package. There's a problem that needs to be solved, but you don't need to change the employment contract of all 140 million [American] employees.”

Lukas wasn't always a high-powered conservative activist. In fact, she wasn't always a conservative. She studied English at Princeton and moved to New York City for a non-political consulting job.

“My parents had always been Republicans, but at least for me it was more we were Republicans in the same way that we were Cubs fan,” she said. “I personally hadn't given it much thought.”

Lukas' journey into policy and politics started at age 23 while visiting her parents' home in Connecticut, where she found a copy of Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead*.

“It's very overwrought in some of her writing, but man, I was 23, I was one of those people who got mildly obsessed,” she said. “I became a voracious reader and became a subscriber to Cato's things and just started reading all that. I quit a much better paying job to go down to Washington with the hope of working at the Cato Institute. I was making copies on a giant copay machine. It was great. Cato is a wonderful place to work and is very egalitarian. Once I got the busywork done, I started to try to write OpEds on my own.”

After Cato, Lukas earned a master's in public policy at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, where she said she filled a gap in her education to better analyze economics and statistics.

“It was a total swamp in terms of nobody reflecting my worldview,” she said. “No other female identified as a non-Democrat other than me and one girl who was technically a Republican, but the most apologetic, but the most liberal Republican. It was crazy how uniformly to the left the student body was.”

Lukas did her Capitol Hill stint after Harvard before landing at IWF, which she said walks the walk in terms of allowing her telecommuting and flexible hours as she navigates parenting and policymaking.

“I'm so proud of what we stand for and what we're trying to do, and I just want us to be able to grow and do more of it,” said Lukas, who manages IWF's 12 full time employees and 10 active writing fellows.

“We’re a small organization but we’re growing—we had a really good couple years,” Lukas said, pointing to the IWF “Working For Women” report released last year laying out a proactive, conservative policy agenda on issues like child care and paid leave. “We’ve been frustrated. We’ve been saying ‘no’ for a long time and we decided we wanted to come out with a positive agenda. We didn’t just want to come out and say ‘no.’”

Does Lukas consider herself a feminist? That’s a loaded question.

“After all these years, I should have a stock answer but I’m always hemming and hawing,” Lukas said. “The word feminism is such a loaded word these days. Outside the U.S., it means basic rights, owning property, deciding whom to marry. Absolutely I would consider myself a feminist in those areas. Here in America, I think that that battle has been won and my daughters have just those same opportunities that my sons have. We’ve totally reached that point, and so much of what we hear when we hear it really has nothing to do with advancing women. I think that term has become so much more associate with this political ideology. I certainly believe in women’s equality, but I do think there’s a lot of misinformation.”

Part of what Lukas sees as misinformation is much of the hype around the anti-Trump resistance movement. And she said the hype actually sounds familiar.

“A lot of the rhetoric we see about the fears about Trump aren’t that different from the fears about George W. Bush,” Lukas said. “People were afraid about women’s rights, but the sky didn’t fall then, and it’s not going to fall now. I hope people would give him a chance.”